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Human resources management

Views of the staff representatives of the United Nations Office at Vienna Staff Council (Vienna), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Staff Council (Santiago), the Economic Commission for Africa Staff Union Committee (Addis Ababa), the Field Staff Union (Brindisi), the United Nations Office at Nairobi Staff Union (Nairobi), and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Staff Council (Bangkok), the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia Staff Union (The Hague), the United Nations University Staff Council (Tokyo), the Staff Association International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Arusha), and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda-Kigali Staff Association (Kigali)

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Report

XXIXth session of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee

Held in New York
23-30 June 2008

I. Introduction

1. The twenty-ninth session of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee (SMCC) took place from 23 to 30 June 2008 in New York.

2. On 19 June 2008, a one-day communications skills workshop for staff representatives was held. The workshop was facilitated by Communications Specialist Gerard Sagar. The workshop served as a refresher course in communications with emphasis on planning and organizing as well as negotiation techniques. The workshop was conducted on the first day of the two-day preparatory sessions that were held separately among staff and management, on 19 and 20 June 2008.

3. The President of SMCC-XXIX, Dieter Goethel, formally opened the session on 23 June 2008, with the Secretary-General in attendance. The President warmly welcomed the Secretary-General, senior staff of his office, and members of the Committee. He stated that SMCC was at a crossroad as the process had been questioned by some of its members, namely, New York and Geneva staff representatives, who were absent from the session. He also noted that the reason for the absence of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees staff representatives was due solely to their lack of elected officials. He highlighted the fact that the absence of New York and Geneva made it critical that the current SMCC address the issue of the institutionalization of staff-management relations, which was one of the agenda items to be discussed during the twenty-ninth session. The President noted, however, that these problems should not overshadow the useful work the Committee had been doing in the areas such as management reform and internal justice. The President then invited the Secretary-General to address the SMCC.

4. The Secretary-General expressed his deep appreciation for the presence of staff representatives from the various duty stations around the world. At the same time, he expressed his disappointment at the current state of staff-management relations, highlighted by the absence of staff representatives of the New York and Geneva staff unions. He addressed members of the SMCC and shared with them his concerns about the current lack of harmonious relations among some staff unions and management. He expressed his desire to review and strengthen staff-management relations, so as to arrive at a meaningful dialogue. Acknowledging that the SMCC may be far from perfect, he also reminded members that it was currently the only formal mechanism in place. He said the time had come to take a fresh and honest look at what could be done to improve the current situation. He acknowledged that the organization could benefit from an expert review, but explained that there was no time to wait for the outcome of a lengthy study before acting. He asked members to act now, especially with new leadership in place in the Department of Management (the Under-Secretary-General), including the Office of

Human Resources Management (the Assistant Secretary-General), who were keen to listen to the staff, and he asked members to be creative and proactive and not shy away from positive, constructive ideas. He requested that both management and staff in SMCC-XXIX immediately undertake a review of the current mechanism so as to come up with recommendations to be submitted to him, which would bring back the absent staff union bodies representing large constituencies.

5. A copy of the statement of the Secretary-General is available in the Secretariat upon request. In attendance with the Secretary-General were several of his senior staff, including the Chef de Cabinet, the Deputy Chef de Cabinet, the Under-Secretary-General for Management, the Assistant Secretaries-General for Human Resources Management, Field Support, Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts and the Capital Master Plan.

6. Following the statement of the Secretary-General, the Vice-President of SMCC-XXVIII, Paulina Analena, expressed her appreciation on behalf of the staff representatives for the presence of the Secretary-General. She noted that, since the return of most of the SMCC members to the table in 2006, significant progress had been made in many areas, including major advances towards changing the internal system of administration of justice. She expressed particular thanks to Alicia Barcena, for her active role in SMCC during her tenure as Under-Secretary-General for Management. She also applauded Mr. Goethel for his excellent job as SMCC President, and for his consistent neutrality, competence and professionalism. On the other hand, she noted the erosion of staff rights and benefits, and the unprecedented attacks on United Nations personnel, with far too many staff members having been killed. She also noted uncertainties over the current mobility scheme, particularly for long-serving staff. She took the opportunity to ask the Secretary-General three questions: (1) whether he was willing to delegate responsibility to his senior managers to reach binding agreements with staff at SMCC; (2) whether he had any thoughts on what could be done to address the significant decline in purchasing power of staff salaries, pension and value of other benefits; and (3) whether he was going to make public the report of the Independent Panel established as a result of the Algiers bombing of 11 December 2007, and if he was contemplating any steps to be taken as a result thereof. The Vice-President's statement is available in the Secretariat upon request.

7. In his response, the Secretary-General confirmed that he intended to continue the consistent practice of delegating whatever powers were needed to the Under-Secretary-General for Management and the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management. However, he noted that even the Secretary-General could not decide on many issues independently, and that he needed to consult Member States through established, time-consuming channels. On the issue of staff salaries and their purchasing power, he acknowledged the serious nature of that matter, indicating that he was unable to act on it immediately, confirming, however, that the International Civil Service Commission was currently reviewing it and that he also had discussed the issue with key contributing Member States. Finally, on the issue of safety and security of staff and premises, the Secretary-General confirmed that he had received the Brahimi report on 9 June, and that it would be released shortly, with some editorial changes. He had already acted on one of the recommendations: the establishment of an accountability panel that would start its work immediately and look into individual responsibilities relating to the Algiers bombing. He added

that the primary purpose of that exercise was to strengthen the sense of accountability he had been promoting since his appointment as Secretary-General.

8. The President of SMCC thanked the Secretary-General for his statement and announced that, given other pressing engagements, the Secretary-General would need to leave at that stage.

9. The President of SMCC made a few announcements, including acknowledging the creation of the SMCC QuickPlace as a useful tool for the sharing of documents and information at the current session of the SMCC.

10. The President sought nominations for the Office of Vice-President of the SMCC. The staff nominated Paulina Analena, Vice-President of the United Nations Staff Union, Vienna, to be Vice-President of SMCC-XXIX, in accordance with Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2002/15. After her nomination had been duly seconded, the President declared her elected and congratulated her, acknowledging the assistance which she had provided during the course of the year, for which he extended his heartfelt thanks. The Vice-President of SMCC-XXVIII then made a statement. She thanked the Committee for the confidence it had placed in her and noted that it was a privilege for her Council and herself to serve the Committee. She also stated that staff and management had made excellent progress in pursuing matters of common interest over the past year.

II. Organization of work

11. At its first meeting, the Committee adopted the agenda of SMCC-XXIX. The Committee decided to retain all agenda items originally proposed, except the item on other human resources issues emanating from the Deputy Secretary-General's Task Force and subsequent Secretary-General's proposals in the area of human resources management. Based on a recommendation from the President, the Committee also agreed to add one item under "Other business", relating to issues emanating from the devaluation of the dollar and its impact on the purchasing power of staff salaries, pensions and the overall issue of the erosion of certain benefits. It was noted that issues relating to rising fuel costs globally and its associated impact on the welfare of staff at large were also related.

12. Subsequently, the President of SMCC confirmed that representatives of the ICSC, the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of Internal Oversight Services had agreed to meet with members of SMCC-XXIX, in the course of the week, and to make presentations relative to their respective offices. That was very much welcomed by the SMCC membership, and scheduled for the morning of 26 June 2008.

13. The list of documents made available at the session is available in the Secretariat upon request, as is the list of participants of SMCC-XXIX. Following a suggestion made by the President, the SMCC decided to adopt an informal approach allowing interventions from all participants in order to maximize contributions from the entire membership of the SMCC. Given the heavy agenda of the current session, the President further requested that, during the proceedings, members limit their interventions to making concrete, succinct comments, observations and/or suggestions.

14. It was agreed that, since the Contact Group on Administration of Justice would continue its work following the current session, there would be no need to convene in-session. Similarly, following discussions on the topic of contracts and harmonization of conditions of service, it was concluded that there was no need to establish an intrasessional working group on the issue. However, as highlighted below, a 4+4 Working Group on the Institutionalization of Staff-Management Relations was established and conducted a full-day working session during the week.

III. Follow-up on the implementation of SMCC agreements

15. The Chair of the 2+2 Contact Group, comprising two staff representatives from the Field Staff Union and the United Nations Office at Geneva, and two management representatives from the United Nations Office at Geneva and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, presented the subject matter. He explained, inter alia, that, as agreed at SMCC-XXVIII, held in Nicosia, more detail had been incorporated in the progress reports to include anticipated actions and time frames. In the transmittal document to the President of SMCC-XXIX, the Working Group made specific recommendations for future monitoring and reporting on SMCC agreements. First, it was recommended that in the future, the list of implemented actions should always reference the specific session number during which those recommendations were approved. Second, when drafting recommendations, they should clearly specify the designated action office and anticipated time frame.

16. The Working Group provided two tables for review by SMCC-XXIX. Table I contained a list of all actions which were outstanding following SMCC-XXVIII. The Working Group highlighted all of those actions which it considered had been fully implemented. Table II contained a list of only those items which had not been completed. The Working Group recommended that it would serve as the basis for subsequent follow-up. The Committee did not object to the proposal and the President confirmed therefore that table II would be the one to proceed with as the basic document for review by SMCC-XXX, in verifying the status of implementation of prior SMCC agreements. The President concluded discussion on this agenda item by thanking the members of the Contact Group for their continuing support in this area.

IV. Institutionalization of staff-management relations and terms of reference of the SMCC

17. The President presented the item for discussion, including the report of the Intersessional Working Group (SMCC-XXIX/2008/5) and working papers submitted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (SMCC-XXIX/2008/12 and Field Staff Union SMCC-XXIX/2008/14). The Committee recognized some important outcomes of the Intersessional Working Group on Institutionalization of Staff-Management Relations, including a proposed change of procedures in making the SMCC an ongoing process rather than one-time-a-year event. However, the Committee noted that critical issues, such as the lack of a mechanism for negotiation and binding agreement, membership of SMCC and the

definition of secretariat, and funding, need to be resolved, in order to prepare terms of reference for SMCC.

18. In particular, staff representatives suggested that they would rely on management's commitment to agree to change the current forum so as to invoke a mechanism for effective negotiations, since the Secretary-General had made it clear in his opening remarks that harmonious relations between staff and management should be dealt with now, and that he was ready to empower the management team to increase their ability to negotiate. Staff also stated that agreements reached at SMCC should be "binding" and that there would be "enforceability" of the binding nature of those agreements. Management stated that without specifically mentioning "negotiations", de facto negotiations had governed the procedures applied by the Committee since it resumed its functioning in 2006. Management further stressed that both parties had worked and continued to work towards reaching consensus on issues of major importance to the staff globally. Following consultations with senior management, including the Secretary-General, management submitted a proposal, at the start of the second day, outlining agreement with the concept of negotiation as a mechanism to reach consensus during SMCC deliberations.

19. The President suggested that a 4+4 working group consisting of staff and management be established in order to discuss details on the proposal submitted by management. The 4+4 Working Group was tasked with developing a framework and delineating the principles which would serve as the basis for the terms of reference for the new staff-management mechanism and requested to consult with those unions who were not present.

20. The Working Group worked separately from the plenary Committee on this matter. During these discussions, the Working Group considered the views expressed in the Intersessional Working Group paper and the papers submitted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the Field Staff Union. The Working Group also took into account informal views from those members who were not present in negotiating and preparing the draft framework. The Working Group submitted to the Committee a revised proposal for further discussions. The management team reviewed the proposal with its senior leadership and made some editorial changes, and the revised proposal was then submitted at the plenary meeting on 26 June to serve as the basis for further discussions.

21. Further discussions were then conducted out of plenary meeting with a modified 4+4 Working Group. The Working Group submitted at the plenary meeting the draft framework agreement, on the evening of 27 June, and with one minor change relating to a subsequent study, the agreement was adopted by the plenary Committee (text available in the Secretariat upon request). Based on the Framework Agreement, the Working Group prepared a draft Secretary-General's bulletin over the weekend and submitted it at the plenary meeting on 30 June. The Committee approved the text of the draft Secretary-General's bulletin (the text is available in the Secretariat upon request) and agreed that further consultation was necessary with member unions who were not present at the current session prior to submission to the Secretary-General in accordance with the established practice.

22. The Committee agreed that the issue of the participation of alternates for associate members will be discussed at the first session of the new Staff-Management Committee (SMC). Noting that the framework agreement and the Secretary-General's bulletin can be effective only if accompanied by an extensive

administrative instruction, the Committee agreed that the following issues should be addressed in the administrative instruction:

1. Modalities for electing the president of SMC;
2. Modalities to address the non-implementation of agreements;
3. The application of expertise in labour-management relations;
4. Modalities for effective participation of staff and management in the SMC process;
5. The development of rules of procedure for SMC, including (special) sessions and working groups;
6. Modalities for reaching consensus;
7. Terms of determining venues and rotation.

The Committee noted that this list is not exhaustive.

V. Administration of justice issues

23. Assisted by videoconferencing, which allowed the participation of one member of the Contact Group and two additional advisers, who could not be present at the SMCC session, the Committee noted that staff and management had worked closely through the Contact Group on Administration of Justice on many issues relating to the implementation of the decisions of the General Assembly contained in resolutions 61/261 and 62/228, including the submission of nominations for members of the Internal Justice Council, the vacancy announcements for the Executive Director of the Office of Administration of Justice and for the Chief of the Office of Staff Legal Assistance. The Contact Group had also discussed the draft reports of the Secretary-General to the Sixth Committee (A/62/748 and Corr.1) and the Fifth Committee (A/62/782). SMCC further noted that much remained to be done prior to the introduction of the new system in January 2009, and that the work would continue through the Contact Group.

24. Reaffirming the continued need for the Contact Group to pursue the various issues, SMCC agreed that the Contact Group would meet via videoconference before 15 July 2008 to plan its work for the remainder of the year. This would include issues relating to:

1. The Secretary-General's response to the General Assembly's request in paragraph 49 of resolution 62/228 for more information on delegation of authority in disciplinary matters, noting that the response had to be submitted by the end of July;
2. The training programme and information campaign on the new system allowing for the inclusion of due regard for local aspects when delivering such programmes (resolution 61/261);
3. The code of conduct for legal practitioners in the new system (ibid.);
4. Any other matter relating to implementation of the new system that requires staff input.

VI. Contracts and harmonization of conditions of service

25. Management introduced this item, highlighting that the issue of streamlining of contracts had been put forward, again, since Member States had requested that the Secretariat submit two documents to the General Assembly for consideration at its 2008 fall session, one on changes to the Staff Regulations and Rules, and one on contracts. Regarding the changes to the Staff Regulations and Rules, management had prepared a comparative table for ease of reference. Management clarified that the full draft text of the new set of Staff Rules would be finalized after SMCC-XXIX and circulated for comments. Regarding the streamlining of contracts, management clarified some of the concerns that had been expressed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the General Assembly in its review, indicating that the Committee's deliberations would need to focus on finding middle ground on some of the more contentious issues.

26. Following deliberations, the Staff strongly reaffirmed its support for the proposals made by Management which followed agreements at previous SMCCs:

1. Temporary appointments:

The Committee agreed with the proposal that temporary appointments would be used for periods up to one year, with, under specific circumstances, the possibility for extension beyond one year, but no longer than for a total of two years.

2. Fixed-term appointments:

(a) The Committee agreed with the proposal that fixed-term appointments would be granted for an initial period of one year or more, with renewal or extension for up to five years.

(b) The Committee also agreed with the proposal of the Secretary-General that contracts of international staff serving in United Nations peace operations would no longer carry a limitation to service with a specific mission.

(c) Regarding extension beyond five years, the Committee reaffirmed its agreement with the proposal.

(d) Regarding the issue of an end-of-service grant, the Committee strongly reaffirmed its agreement and recommended that the Secretary-General ask the International Civil Service Commission and the General Assembly to give serious and immediate consideration to this matter.

3. Continuing appointments:

(a) Management indicated that during Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and General Assembly deliberations they maintained the position that had been agreed to at SMCC-XXVII in Nicosia, i.e., that a ceiling on the number of conversions to continuing appointments would not be sound management practice, and therefore not acceptable from a staff-management perspective, but Member States had indicated that it was nevertheless necessary to have such a ceiling. Staff confirmed strong opposition to the intention of Member States to apply a ceiling to the number of conversions to continued appointments. Staff

representatives noted the established practice of national civil servants being granted permanent appointment status after a probationary period. Staff also noted that provisions for downsizing in response to budget reductions or strategic changes in staffing levels were already incorporated into the proposed contractual arrangements. In taking this position, the Committee agreed to maintain its position that it could not support the application of a ceiling.

(b) Regarding eligibility for conversion, the Committee agreed with the proposals of the Secretary-General to include staff who work on projects or entities with finite mandates as well as locally recruited staff whose services continue to be needed beyond five years and who meet eligibility requirements for consideration for continuing appointments.

(c) With regard to the procedures proposed for consideration for conversion, the Committee agreed to the establishment of a rigorous review mechanism that would cover performance as well as continuing need and other relevant criteria, including the ones that had been reviewed by SMCC-XXVIII.

(d) The Committee reaffirmed its agreement with the proposal of the Secretary-General that, consistent with proposals covering all other staff, those staff recruited through national competitive examinations should also be considered for continuing appointments after five years of service. The staff emphasized that in the interest of equitable treatment of all staff members, the mode of recruitment should not determine the type of appointment offered.

(e) The Committee was in agreement with the Secretary-General's interpretation of the applicability of termination "in the interest of the Organization", as contained in document SMCC-XXIX/2008/10, including also the review process as well as the rights of the individual to contest the decision.

VII. Mobility

27. Management introduced the topic of mobility by submitting papers SMCC-XXIX/2008/3 and SMCC-XXIX/2008/6 to the Committee.

28. From the Intersessional Working Group on Mobility (SMCC-XXIX/2008/3), it transpired that there was no contention between staff and management on the broad concept of mobility, as expressed in General Assembly resolution 55/258, section V, Mobility. There was general agreement that mobility would contribute to both strengthening the Organization and the skills sets of staff members, but there were diverging views on the success of the managed mobility programme, on the mechanisms used to implement the programme, and on the need to treat all categories of staff equally in the process (where resolution 55/258 specified a process at the Professional and higher levels). On the latter, staff were of the opinion that mobility for locally recruited staff should be strictly voluntary, and be looked at primarily in the context of individual skills development. The Working Group had identified many areas that required further clarification and/or review in determining the way forward, including the outcome of deliberations at the General Assembly on related human resources matters, such as the harmonization of contracts. As such, the Working Group had concluded that there would be a need to

continue its work, including the possibility of launching a survey, short but targeted, to collect views of the staff once the first round of managed mobility is completed.

29. The annual report on mobility (SMCC-XXIX/2008/6) highlighted that there had been considerable movement of staff between and within departments, but far less movement between duty stations (geographic mobility). It was felt that, for the latter, certain issues such as spouse employment, the effective transfer of knowledge, work/life issues, hardship and lack of financial incentives continued to pose impediments to the successful implementation of the programme, and that any further mobility would be dependent on the successful resolution of some of those issues. Nevertheless, management considered that the first round of managed mobility would need to be completed, in an attempt to be consistent in the treatment of all staff, before a review and possible decision on the future of the mobility programme would be reached.

30. During the ensuing discussions, staff representatives highlighted the importance of adjusting the mobility programme to provide for better incentives to the staff, with an increased emphasis on geographic mobility. They also stressed that for locally recruited staff, mobility should be more focused on personal skills and career development. The Committee emphasized the need for training as a requirement for improving performance management and took note with regret of the recent reduction in training funds.

31. In concluding its deliberations, the Committee agreed with the continuation of the current managed mobility programme, i.e., the staff at the D-1, D-2 and P-5 and General Service-5 levels. After completion of that first round, the Committee proposed that the managed mobility programme be suspended, and that a review be undertaken to adjust the programme to incorporate lessons learned. Such a review could include, inter alia, a (short) survey to capture the experiences and views of the staff. In the meantime, the Committee also agreed that the Intersessional Working Group on Mobility would continue its work, and report back at SMCC-XXX.

VIII. Performance management

32. Management introduced the topic by presenting papers SMCC-XXIX/2008/4 and SMCC-XXIX/2008/7 to the Committee.

33. In their discussions, there was broad agreement among staff and management on a number of issues, including, but not limited to, (a) ongoing difficulties with the current rating system, entailing differing ratings distributions among departments and offices; (b) difficulties in accessing the ePAS electronic tool; (c) the need to provide adequate, additional mandatory training to staff and management in order to ensure better application of the performance management mechanism; and (d) the need to hold managers and staff accountable for accurate ePAS compliance, etc.

34. On the basis of the discussions, the Committee agreed to establish a small 1+1 Intrasessional Working Group. The Group met on 25 June 2008, on the basis of which a report was produced (text available in the Secretariat upon request).

35. Following the discussion, the Committee agreed that the Intersessional Working Group on Performance Management should continue its work and present a comprehensive proposal on a new ePAS at the next SMCC. In this context,

particular attention would be paid to ensuring more rigour in applying performance management.

36. Management informed the Committee that, in the meantime, it would continue ongoing work aimed at improving the current ePAS tool, and that feedback received from the staff would feed into this work, including strengthening access for local administrations, reporting, monitoring, etc. Management also announced that an administrative instruction on better compliance would be issued soon.

IX. Staff selection system

37. Management introduced the topic by presenting document SMCC-XXIX/2008/9 on staffing.

38. Management informed the Committee that, as part of its efforts to transform the staff selection system, a new talent management system was being developed to replace Galaxy, with the software provider to be selected shortly. In addition, an Outreach Unit was being established within the Office of Human Resources Management that would proactively support managers in identifying potential candidates for their vacancies. Management furthermore noted that, despite progress made in many areas governing staff selection, dating back to agreements reached at SMCC-XXVII in 2006, several issues were pending review and agreement, to be reached at the current session of SMCC, in order to be able to successfully transform the staff selection system. These included the need for simplification and streamlining in the creation of vacancies and in establishing eligibility criteria, the continued endorsement of a roster-based selection system, the need for outreach efforts to meet geography and gender targets, the process of filling P-2 posts, and the requirement to strengthen the accountability framework.

39. Staff reiterated that staff at large have expressed concern about the integrity of the staff selection system. Despite some improvements in the system, staff expressed concern about the role of the central review bodies and the limited presence of checks and balances in the system.

40. Staff and management agreed that measures should be taken to ensure the consistent implementation of the administrative procedures across the system. The use of best practices and the provision of training on that basis to all duty stations was important. Management committed itself to implement additional training.

41. SMCC agreed that there should be more transparency in the process by providing staff with more feedback on their application and status, including those who are being rostered.

42. In line with the request for more transparency and accountability, staff representatives suggested that they be allowed to sit in interview sessions as observers to ensure fairness and transparency of the process, similar to the role performed by gender focal points.

43. The Committee discussed the various recommendations presented to them for review. The Committee agreed to the following:

1. Roster-based selection system:

Management explained that given a very high vacancy rate anticipated for the coming years, in large part due to natural attrition, an active roster system would go a long way in supporting the identification of suitable candidates. This, combined with greater use of generic job profiles, would accelerate the placement of staff. Staff indicated that there was less concern regarding the use of a strengthened roster system than with the current functioning of the central review body. However, staff pointed out that in order to make the roster system more transparent and effective, it was necessary to provide rostered candidate feedback on their status. Taking into account these comments, the Committee agreed to the recommendations for roster-based selection.

2. Eligibility rules:

The Committee agreed to eliminate the complex eligibility rules (15/30/60-day time-marks) with the understanding that internal candidates would be identified to managers to ensure they were given full and fair consideration in accordance with staff regulation 4.4.

3. Streamlining the creation of vacancy announcements:

Staff expressed concern that it was not easy to navigate through vacancy announcements. Management subscribed to this concern and would seek to address the matter under the new talent management system, which would have features that are currently not available on Galaxy.

The Committee noted the intention of management to use more generic vacancy announcements and to merge the announcement with the evaluation criteria, which were currently two separate documents. The Committee agreed that as long as the Office of Human Resources Management ensured that programme managers comply with the criteria established in Office of Human Resources Management standards and in the generic job profiles, the merged vacancy announcement/evaluation criteria would not require a review by central review bodies before they are issued.

4. Membership of central review bodies:

There was considerable discussion on the role and functioning of the central review bodies. Staff representatives indicated there was apprehension about the usefulness of the central review bodies process, since there was a strong perception that they merely acted as a rubber stamping mechanism. Management explained that, from their side, they considered that the central review bodies were very diligent in executing their responsibilities with, at times, perhaps overly zealous attempts to challenge managers in reviewing candidates. Staff explored the possibility of using central review bodies to provide feedback to non-successful candidates, which led management to clarify that the central review bodies were neither mandated, nor equipped, to do so.

The Committee noted the intention of management to increase the central review body membership and possibly eliminate term limits for select duty stations.

The Committee also agreed that to ensure more consistent application, the Office of Human Resources Management would collect best practices within the Secretariat and issue rules and procedures and guidelines.

5. Geography and gender targets:

Following considerable discussion on the topic, the Committee noted the outreach activities to be pursued in identifying candidates, particularly from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States and the intention to apply stricter targets for female representation on shortlists to be prepared for interviews.

6. P-2 posts:

The Committee took note of the proposed system for the filling of P-2 vacancies.

7. Accountability:

Staff representatives reiterated earlier concerns that accountability of managers needs to be strengthened, including in staff selection. The Committee welcomed the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen accountability, including his intention to intervene and stop a process if established requirements are not satisfied.

8. Feedback:

It was agreed that a communication would be issued to all Programme Case Officers, reminding them to provide feedback to non-successful candidates as a career development tool.

X. Staff Regulations and Rules

44. Management presented a comparison table to SMCC-XXIX which included the 100, 200 and 300 series Staff Rules in a single table format in order to facilitate further review and future discussion once the new set of revised Staff Rules has been prepared and circulated. The Committee considered proposals for the new contractual arrangements, including the conditions of service for temporary appointments, the current short-term contracts and the new temporary appointments. The Committee noted that as an example, staff with temporary appointments of less than six months would no longer be eligible for paternity leave. In that connection, the Committee agreed, however, that paternity leave should be granted to those staff whose appointments are extended for at least six months. The Committee noted that the Office of Human Resources Management will submit the proposed text of the new set of staff rules in due course with a clear indication of changes.

XI. Other business

Briefings by the ICSC, UNJSPF, Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of Internal Oversight Services

45. As described in the organization of work, presentations were made to the SMCC from each office and provided in a discussion and question and answer period with SMCC participants.

1. The ICSC Chairman and Vice-Chairman addressed the Committee and presented an overview of current issues and time frames being addressed by the Commission.

Staff stated that the reason for discussing the issue of loss of purchasing power and erosion of benefits in the context of SMCC was that the reform of the United Nations, particularly in the area of human resources, had increased the responsibility of staff in many areas. Staff felt that the increased responsibility needed to be matched by the offer of incentives in the form of payment and benefits. Staff expressed concern about the loss of purchasing power and the erosion of the current benefit system. In particular, the methodologies being used for the determination of local salaries and post adjustment needed to be improved to be able to capture changes in the living conditions and salaries. Of particular concern was the situation of staff serving in field missions. Also, concern was expressed about the review of the methodology for the determination of the education grant. Staff stated that any improvement of the methodology should not penalize staff and reduce the benefit granted under the current scheme. Staff also questioned the continued use of the salary scale of the United States civil service as a comparator. All this was having an impact on the capacity of the United Nations to attract qualified staff.

2. The representatives from the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund presented a PowerPoint presentation on its report on the impact of currency fluctuations on UNJSPF pension benefits, which will be submitted at the upcoming Pension Board meeting in July 2008. They then fielded questions. A copy of their presentation is available in the Secretariat upon request.

Staff expressed their concern about the future of the pensions. The value of the pensions paid in euros and in other currencies was affected by the decreasing value of the United States dollar. It was necessary to provide better information to staff to allow them to understand the characteristics of the pension system. In addition, staff asked the Pension Fund to continue providing advice to the Pension Board on opportune solutions to address the uncertainty caused by currency fluctuations.

3. The Ombudsman gave a presentation on the current functions of the Office of the Ombudsman, including the status of the vacancy announcements for the regional ombudsmen.

4. Michael Dudley, Deputy Director, Investigations Division, took questions from participants. In response to the questions concerning staff participation in the Office of Internal Oversight Services development of an integrated system of processes and unified rules of procedure and its review of its Manual of Investigations, Mr. Dudley advised that the Office of Internal Oversight Services would take into consideration in the Manual, any comments from

staff representatives and/or other staff when the Manual is issued. As the Manual would be issued electronically and is intended to be updated regularly, adjustments to the Manual could easily be made. In addition, Mr. Dudley stated that he was willing to set aside places in the investigations training programme for staff representatives.

Composition of the Contact Group for Implementation of Prior Agreements

46. It was decided that management would continue to be represented by Geneva and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and staff would be represented by Vienna and the Field Staff Union.

Staff-funded legal defence

47. Concerning resolution 62/228 in which the General Assembly requested additional information relating to any proposal for a staff-funded scheme for legal assistance to staff, the staff representatives expressed their concerns and doubts regarding the appropriateness and viability of such an approach. Staff stated that by joining the United Nations system, they were losing their rights to pursue labour-related disputes according to their national legislation. In many national jurisdictions, those rights included access to legal representation. Therefore, staff reiterated their opinion that within the new system of internal justice for the United Nations, legal representation should be provided for and funded. In addition to that funded system, pro bono volunteer staff representation may be contemplated potentially by law school students, or other legal expertise.

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

48. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda staff representatives requested bilateral discussions with the Office of Human Resources Management following up on previously submitted documents on the future of the staff of the two Tribunals. This was agreed by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management.

XII. Venue of SMCC-XXX

49. SMCC concurred that the next venue of SMCC should be at a site other than United Nations Headquarters in accordance with the established rule. This will be decided at a later date.

50. The management leadership offered that the next SMCC may be brought forward and ideally it may be more appropriate to hold the next session in April 2009. This would allow for an earlier session, yet be able to take into consideration any decisions of the General Assembly which occur during the first resumed session.

XIII. Adoption of the report of SMCC-XXIX

51. SMCC adopted its report, together with four annexes, on its twenty-ninth session for submission to the Secretary-General.